

Message Text

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PARA 5 LINES 4 THRU 9)

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI, TH
SUBJ: NEW THAI SUPREME COMMANDER

REF: A) STATE 226642 B) BANGKOK 20535

1. REF A IDENTIFIES THREE POINTS OF INTEREST TO THE DEPARTMENT IN CONNECTION WITH THE REVAMPED THAI SUPREME COMMAND. REF B IS A GENERAL COMMENTARY ON THE SUBJECT. FOLLOWING ARE COMMENTS ON THE THREE SPECIFIC POINTS IN REF A.

2. QUESTION: WOULD ANY SUPREME COMMANDER, PARTICULARLY ONE FROM THE ROYAL THAI NAVY, BE CAPABLE OF THWARTING A COUP OR EVEN BE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT MOST PLANNING? ANSWER: THE SUPREME COMMANDER WOULD NOT BE IN A POSITION TO THWART A COUP AND MIGHT NOT EVEN BE AWARE OF COUP PLOTS UNLESS, IN ADDITION TO THE SUPREME COMMAND, HE ALSO HAD A KEY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ROYAL THAI ARMY. THIS RELATIONSHIP, AS IN THE CASE OF GENERAL KRIT, COULD BE IN THE FORM OF HOLDING A POSITION IN THE ARMY CONCURRENTLY WITH THE ROLE OF SUPREME COMMANDER. KRIT HAS BEEN SIMULTANEOUSLY SUPREME COMMANDER AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ROYAL THAI ARMY. IT COULD ALSO (AS IN THE CASE OF THANOM) ARISE FROM THE FACT THAT THE SUPREME COMMANDER, PRIOR TO ASSUMING THAT ROLE, HAD BEEN COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE RTA AND HAD PLACED OFFICERS LOYAL TO HIM IN KEY ARMY SLOTS.

3. ALMOST BY DEFINITION, A NAVAL OFFICER DOES NOT HAVE SUCH
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A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE RTA AND THEREFORE AS SUPREME COMMANDER

WOULD BE ISOLATED FROM KNOWLEDGE OF COUP PLANNING WITHIN THE ARMY. IN THE PAST, RTA COUP PLANS HAVE BEEN ENTRUSTED TO ONLY A HANDFUL OF SENIOR OFFICERS, REPORTEDLY NEVER MORE THAN SIX, WITH OTHER SENIOR STAFF OFFICERS AND KEY COMMANDERS BROUGHT IN ON THE PLAN ONLY SHORTLY BEFORE EXECUTION. IF ADMIRAL SA-NGAT AS SUPREME COMMANDER DID IN ANY CASE OBTAIN KNOWLEDGE OF A PLANNED COUP, HE WOULD NOT HAVE THE FORCE WITHIN HIS COMMAD TO STOP IT EVEN IF HE WANTED TO.

4. QUESTION: WOULD THE NOMINATION OF AN ADMIRAL WEAKEN WHAT CONTROL THE SUPREME COMMAND MIGHT HAVE OVER POTENTIAL MILITARY PLOTTERS? ANSWER: AS POINTED OUT ABOVE, SUPREME COMMAND IN ITSELF HAS ALMOST NO POWER OVER POTENTIAL MILITARY PLOTTERS EXCEPT WHERE THE SUPREME COMMANDER ALSO CONTROLS THE ARMY. IT IS NOT THE NOMINATION OF AN ADMIRAL (OR AN AIR FORCE OFFICER, OR EVEN A KRIANGSAK, THAT IS, AN ARMY OFFICER WITH NO POWER BASE IN THE ARMY) THAT WEAKENS SUPREME COMMAND'S POSITION IN THIS REGARD, BUT RATHER THE NON-NOMINATION OF AN OFFICER WHO CONTROLS THE LEVERS OF ARMY POWER.

5. QUESTION: IN VIEW OF THE LONG STANDING ANIMOSITY BETWEEN THE RTN AND THE RTA, MIGHT SA-NGAT'S APPOINTMENT ALIENATE THE RTA TO SUCH AN EXTENT AS TO DESTABILIZE THE POLITICAL SITUATION? ANSWER: THE MISSION IS NOT AWARE OF FRICTION BETWEEN THE RTN AND THE RTA DURING THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS. THE RTA DOES NOT VIEW THE RTN AS A SERIOUS RIVAL. THE RTA VIEWS THE POSITION OF SUPREME COMMANDER AS THAT OF A FIGUREHEAD WITH NO REAL POWER. THE ARMY ATTACHE RECENTLY ASKED A THAI ARMY GENERAL OFFICER WHO IS A GOOD PERSONAL FRIEND OF HIS WHETHER THE GENERAL WOULD PREFER TO BE SUPREME COMMANDER OR COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE RTA. AFTER RIDICULING THE QUESTION ITSELF AS NOT SERIOUS, THE THAI OFFICER REPLIED, "OF COURSE, I WOULD RATHER BE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE RTA. IN FACT, I WOULD RATHER BE FIRST ARMY COMMANDER THAN SUPREME COMMANDER."

6. THE DEFENSE ATTACHE PARTICIPATED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS MESSAGE, WHICH REFLECTS THE VIEWS OF THE MISSION AS A WHOLE. MASTERS

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